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PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1996-1997

Impact of approved savings measures on the implementation of mandated programmes and activities

Report of the Secretary-General

1. In section II, paragraph 11, of its resolution 50/214, of 23 December 1995, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, in addition to the biennial budget performance report, to present no later than the end of the fiftieth session and in June 1997 a programme performance report on the impact of approved savings measures on the implementation of mandated programmes and activities.

2. In section II, paragraph 7, of the same resolution, the General Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to present to the Assembly no later than 31 March 1996 a report containing proposals of possible savings for its consideration and approval. Following its consideration of that report (A/C.5/50/57), the General Assembly, in its resolution 50/230 of 7 June 1996, requested that a further report be presented in the normal budgetary format with sufficient detail to enable it to take action, as recommended by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/50/7/Add.16). By the end of the fiftieth session, on 17 September 1996, the Secretariat's programme of work had entered into the second quarter of the biennium and the Assembly had received the second report containing proposals to meet the budget reduction of $154 million (A/C.5/50/57/Add.1) and the views of the Advisory Committee thereon (A/51/7/Add.1).

3. In its resolution 51/221 B of 18 December 1996, the General Assembly, having considered those reports, regretted that the programme performance report on the impact of approved savings measures on the implementation of mandated

programmes and activities had not been received and requested the Secretary-General to submit it no later than 1 March 1997.

4. In his letter dated 28 May 1997 to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly on the question of the programme performance report, the Controller stated that it was his belief that the report of the Secretary-General in document A/C.5/50/57/Add.1 had responded to the request of the General Assembly in the absence of a programme performance report, which was the responsibility of the Office of Internal Oversight Services and which could not be undertaken until the biennium was over. As the Fifth Committee was requesting more information, the Controller stated, that without prejudice to the assignment of responsibility for reporting on programme performance, he had requested all programme managers to submit information on the impact of the approved savings measures on the implementation of mandated programmes and activities. That information would then be submitted in narrative form to complement the information already submitted in the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/50/57/Add.1) and in the report of the Advisory Committee thereon (A/51/7/Add.1).

5. The impact of the budget reductions presented in the present report should be seen in the context of the current level of implementation and anticipated level of implementation by year end.

Summary findings

6. At the present stage of implementation of the programme of work for 1996-1997, it is expected that mandated programmes and activities will be implemented; the objectives are expected to be met, although at a level that might vary in some instances from that initially planned. At the same time, technological innovations and improved working methods have helped to enhance the ongoing work of simplifying processes, streamlining procedures and eliminating excessive paperwork requirements.

7. While the Secretariat has found ways to mitigate the immediate impact of the $154 million budget reduction by modifying work methods, there has, nevertheless, been an impact on the long-term work of the Organization. The necessity to deal with immediate issues has diverted attention from some longer-term efforts to prepare the Organization for the challenges ahead. For example, reductions in the scope of analysis and treatment of issues or curtailment of representation of the Organization in meetings and other events around the world has in some areas of the Organization resulted in a reduced level of United Nations presence in international, regional and national dialogue.

8. The efforts made to meet the budget reductions, while at the same time implementing mandated programmes and activities, have reaffirmed the importance of the work of the Organization in maintaining a global perspective, providing an international element in its research and analyses and ensuring the objectivity of policy recommendations. To ensure the universality of the United Nations and its treatment of global issues and of the international consequences of actions taken by its membership, the Secretariat must be fully equipped to meet emerging future needs and the concerns of all Member States.

9. It became clear that reductions of the magnitude of $154 million requested by the General Assembly could only be achieved with a significant reduction in staff costs. Thus, to achieve reductions of such a magnitude, programme managers have had to maintain vacancy rates significantly higher than budgeted for. In addition, reductions in consultants, travel and operational costs have also been necessary.

10. In order to ensure that all mandated programmes and activities be implemented, it has been necessary to take measures to mitigate the impact of staff reductions by instituting more efficient and cost-saving ways of working. A review of the programmes of work towards their possible reorientation, reorganization and, if necessary, modification have also contributed to the lessening of the impact of the budget reductions. Measures adopted have taken the form of simplification of processes and procedures, restructuring or streamlining of organizational structures, clarification and reorientation of interdepartmental functions and redistribution of tasks and responsibilities. Notwithstanding programme managers' efforts to carry out their mandated activities more efficiently, some of the programmed activities have been affected in regard to their scope or timeliness of delivery. On the other hand, the review has also resulted in the streamlining of some programmed activities that needed adjustments because of the span of time between their planning and actual implementation. It should be noted that when compared to the total volume of the programme of activities mandated to be carried out by the Organization only a very small number of outputs have been affected. Programme managers of course have made every effort to minimize negative effects on priority areas.

11. In this connection effects on the implementation of the programme of activities can be categorized under the following broader issues:

(a) It should be understood that qualitative measures of performance are highly subjective; the reduced capacity for in-depth research and analysis have had an impact on the quality of reports and publications that are intended to increase awareness and understanding of global issues, trends and problems. Consequently, the end-users of the Secretariat's outputs, namely Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, specialized agencies of the United Nations system, policy makers, the academic community, officials, the public and others have received a lesser benefit than would otherwise have been the case;

(b) The capacity to manage, oversee and coordinate staff activities effectively, to organize meetings, expert groups and seminars and to conduct consultations with Member States and other entities has in some instances, where staff were asked to assume increasingly more responsibilities, been stretched. In such instances, the Secretariat's capacity to respond in a timely fashion to requests for services to Member States has also been affected. Other areas of essential work such as fact-finding, liaison and consultations with Governments and other entities, and representation of the Organization at meetings that address issues of concern to the international community, have been affected, since available staff resources have had to concentrate on issues in a more prioritized manner;

(c) Reductions in resources for expert group meetings, which have been programmed for the purpose of obtaining advice and information and fostering the exchange of experience, have resulted in fewer meetings being convened, and when they have been convened, the number of participants and the number of days scheduled have often been reduced. The reduced scope, with the consequent reduction of expertise gained from them, has in some cases affected the depth and scope of the analytical content of studies under preparation;

(d) With regard to non-post items, reduced resources have resulted in less travel for data collection, advisory services, consultations with Governments and other entities - a situation which programme managers have overcome in many instances by resorting to other innovative ways to accomplish the mandated outputs. Reductions in resources for consultants have affected the availability of additional and specialized expertise to the Secretariat in such areas as commercial law, specialized issues for inclusion in reports and studies, development of strategies, policy options and programmes of action, or the establishment of databases and technological innovations, where the lack of such specialized expertise has had an impact in regard to timely implementation of activities and services of the highest quality;

(e) Because of the linkages of work between and among the departments and offices of the Secretariat, delays occurring in one area have affected the timely implementation of work in other areas. For instance, the delays in the preparation and submission of documents and publications by one area have resulted in delays in editing, translation and reproduction by other areas. The inability or reduced capacity of one department/office to provide data or carry out analyses has prevented another department/office from coordinating the required inputs for consolidated reports that are to reflect an integrated and global perspective;

(f) As mentioned earlier, the Secretariat has been able to mitigate the impact of the budgetary reductions to a great extent by identifying and implementing efficiencies. The effort has added an extra burden on the staff. If staff resources had been available the scope of the efficiency gains would have been even larger. It would be remiss to ignore the increase in the workload, responsibilities and working hours of staff in their efforts to ensure the full implementation of mandated programmes and activities. At present, reductions have often resulted in additional burdens on existing staff, stretching available expertise thinly. With the continued simplification of processes, technological innovations and gradual rationalization and prioritization of work, this situation is expected to improve.

12. The programme performance report, on the impact of approved savings measures on the implementation of mandated programmes and activities, is presented below by budget section.

Section 1. Overall policy-making, direction and coordination

13. The United Nations Board of Auditors expects that the completion of summary records of the meetings of the Panel of External Auditors and the special session of the Board will be delayed, which might affect the transmission of the Board's report to the General Assembly.

14. In the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, tasks and assignments have been redistributed in order to maintain an appropriate level of support for the Secretary-General. In the Offices of the Directors-General of the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna, a redistribution of tasks and assignments has also been effected and representation at meetings has been curtailed.

Section 2. Political affairs

15. The Department for Political Affairs has implemented mandated activities by increasing the workload for staff members and the prioritization of work, curtailing less urgent activities such as travel for familiarization with political situations, working missions, brain-storming sessions within the Department and beyond and exchanges with outside academic and research institutions. If continued for too long, this will affect the Department's ability to develop comprehensive approaches to addressing political issues.

16. The meetings of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, which serves as the think-tank on disarmament and security issues and advises the Secretary-General thereon, have been reduced from four to two during the current biennium. This might in the longer run affect the Board's ability to develop forward-looking ideas and strategies to address new challenges and risks in disarmament. Fewer meetings of the Standing Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa might, in the future, curtail the Secretariat's ability to address urgent security problems in the region and resolve them before they lead to major crises.

17. Reducing the number of fellowships in the disarmament programme has limited the opportunity for diplomats from developing countries and the countries in transition to be trained in the field of arms limitation and disarmament.

Section 3. Peacekeeping operations and special missions

18. Owing to a lack of staff resources, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations has not been able to manage peacekeeping operations effectively and, in some cases, has limited its efforts to provide an adequate crisis response. For example, in the logistics area, the updates to policies and procedures and the official promulgation of a number of manuals and guidelines have been delayed; enhancements to internal control in the field have also been curtailed.

19. Field mission objectives have not been significantly affected by the reduction in resources even though there have been some modifications to field mission activities. The United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) has closed a radio room, contracted out various services and extended the tours of military observers to reduce the frequency of rotations; and the replacement of vehicles, computers and other office equipment have been postponed. The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) has reduced the scope of its refurbishment programme and delayed upgrading its computer hardware. Because of reductions in staff and travel resources, personnel of the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories have had to assume additional functions and responsibilities when on official visits to the West Bank.

Section 4. Outer space affairs

20. The impact of the budget reductions on the programme relates primarily to the delayed issuance of technical and legal studies on issues related to the peaceful exploration and use of outer space and the implications for monitoring the environment and resource management. The scope of advisory services provided to Member States has also been modified by consolidating a number of projects.

Section 5. International Court of Justice

21. Delays have been encountered in responding to the increasing requirements for translation and printing of the Court's reports and publications.

Section 6. Legal activities

22. In the Office of Legal Affairs, many staff members have been consistently overworked, keeping longer hours than can be expected on a sustained basis. The requirements to respond urgently to many requests for legal opinions and for the production of drafts of legal instruments or comments thereon have meant that those legal products have often had to be prepared without the same level of research that would normally be desirable. Reduced resources for consultants have threatened the ability to retain the services of experts in specialized areas of commercial law. Projects for electronic management of records, like the implementation of Lexis database, retrieval of United Nations Administrative Tribunal case law as well as record-keeping and legal information management and retrieval have been delayed. The updating of the Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs cannot be carried out in a timely and satisfactory manner. At the same time, the Office has been able to embark on a comprehensive reform of administrative issuances.

23. The United Nations Commission on International Trade Law has not been able to prepare certain reports or to organize the symposium scheduled for May 1997; requests for legislative assistance, briefing missions and seminars have not been met. The reduction in research capacity has threatened the quality of work and has resulted in the delay of the law-making process. Assistance to Member States in their efforts to implement effectively the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea has had to be curtailed.

Section 7A. Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development

24. A number of initiatives envisaged for addressing issues such as globalization, regional integration and the impact of technology on development have been delayed by the Division for Policy Coordination and Economic and Social Council Affairs. The strengthening of relations between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations has also been affected.

25. The budget reductions have had an impact on the Division for the Advancement of Women, affecting the work flow, quality control and outputs of the work of the Division. Outreach activities and participation in intergovernmental and non-governmental meetings have been curtailed, and promotional and advocacy activities have been reduced.

Section 7B. Africa: critical economic situation, recovery and development

26. There were no budget reductions in this section.

Section 8. Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis

27. It is anticipated that the overall objectives of the Department for 1996-1997 will be met and no reorientation or reformulation of the activities are required. However, the launching or strengthening of work on issues emanating from the major conferences (e.g., social and environment statistics, intern migration) were curtailed. Owing to a reduction in the number of publications, some data and analyses will not be generated for Governments to better understand the issues that may affect the development and formulation of their national policies and programmes. Reduced staff resources, particularly at the supervisory levels, have also had an impact on the level of in-depth analysis, quality control and timely delivery of outputs. Staff at all levels have had to assume additional functions and responsibilities.

Section 9. Department for Development Support and Management Services

28. With reduced staffing, particularly at senior levels, substantive participation at various international forums and overall management in the areas of water resources and of cartography have been weakened. Delivery of some projects has also been delayed, particularly where there has been an increase in demand for technical cooperation services, such as those related to economies in transition. The junior level staff have had to assume additional functions and responsibilities without the full benefit of appropriate supervision and guidance. Issuance of the proceedings of some of the meetings and a number of recurrent publications have been delayed.

29. In the Governance, Public Administration and Finance Division, reduced staffing has resulted in the postponement of an expert group meeting on integrated financial management systems in developing countries and countries in transition, and of the non-recurrent publication on civil service training and management development.

Section 10A. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

30. The budget reductions have not had an impact on the overall programme, which was restructured following the decisions of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development at its ninth session.

Section 11. United Nations Environment Programme

31. The budget reductions have prevented the representation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in a number of international forums. The development of new policies has been curtailed; and the transfer of experiences and technologies has been delayed owing to the reduced capacity for organizing interregional consultations. The capacity to provide countries in transition with advisory services on identification of priorities and opportunities for action has been affected.

Section 12. United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)

32. Programme delivery has been affected owing to the postponement or cancellation of some activities.

Section 13. Crime control

33. The reduced resources have affected the capacity of the Secretariat to update databases, incorporating: the results of a survey on available training opportunities and facilities; needs of Member States in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice; and the possibilities for cooperation. The number of lectures to high-ranking law enforcement and criminal justice officials and the capacity to respond to requests from Governments on needs assessment and development of project proposals have been reduced. Participation in activities for the purpose of consultation, collaboration and liaison with Governments and other entities has had to be curtailed.

Section 14. International drug control

34. Deferring expert group meetings, while not impeding the achievement of objectives, has reduced the capacity of the programme to promote accession to and implementation of international drug control treaties. In reducing by half the number of meetings of subsidiary bodies of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the possibility for the United Nations International Drug Control Programme to promote collaboration and exchange of operational information among Member States has been affected. Because of reduced staffing resources, the capacity of the Programme to establish a worldwide international drug abuse assessment system could not be carried out and the Programme's capacity to provide advice to Governments on standardized national data collection systems has been reduced. This has made it more difficult for the Programme to obtain complete country data on drug abuse and to ensure monitoring, analysis and reporting on worldwide trends. The reduction in the membership of the standing panel on the quality assurance programme for laboratory practices and time available to review documentation has resulted in less comprehensive recommendations.

35. The deferral of two expert group meetings, one on the macroeconomic effects of drug trafficking in selected developing countries and economies in transition and the other on new forms of international cooperation in law enforcement with particular reference to the problems of transit States, has affected the level of understanding of drug trafficking patterns in the geographic areas in question.

36. The need to maintain vacancies has delayed the introduction of improved regulatory procedures to control movements of psychotropic substances and prevent diversion into the illicit traffic and in the introduction of more comprehensive procedures for the assessment of substances for possible inclusion in, transfer between or deletion from tables I and II of the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988.

Section 15. Economic Commission for Africa

37. A significant portion of the budget reductions has been realized through improved management practices, strengthened monitoring and evaluation functions, more optimal use of travel and consultancy resources and the rationalization of the number, duration and scope of meetings and documentation. However, the comprehensiveness and depth of approach to issues addressed by the Economic Commission for Africa have suffered; and policy advocacy has been curtailed owing to reduced travel resources. The budget reductions have also affected the pace of office automation and the proper maintenance of the Conference Centre.

Section 16. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

38. The budget reductions have affected the timely delivery of activities in trade and promotion, environment, women in development and infrastructure development. Some research and analyses on environment issues and policies have been curtailed, affecting the scope of coverage in a number of studies and publications that were aimed at increasing the knowledge and understanding by the least developed, landlocked and island developing countries.

Section 17. Economic Commission for Europe

39. The increased workload for the existing staff did not allow for full response to additional demands of Member States and affected the quality and timeliness of outputs. Areas affected include the processing and dissemination of statistical data, coverage of economic analysis, coordination among international organizations and exchange of experience among countries. In some other instances the quality of work could only be maintained through the extra effort of existing staff, which cannot be continued indefinitely.

Section 18. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

40. Reduced staff resources have resulted in the cancellation of a number of reports and studies intended to provide analyses and information to Governments as a basis for the development of policies and programmes, particularly in the areas of natural resources and energy, economic and social planning, international trade, environment and human settlements, statistics and economic projections. The cancellation of expert group meetings has affected the scope of coverage of research and analysis of issues of concern to Member States in the region.

Section 19. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

41. To meet the budget reductions, a number of units were restructured and reorganized in order to implement the mandated activities. While the objectives of the programme remain valid and will be met, a number of outputs have been reformulated or delayed.

Section 20. Regular programme of technical cooperation

42. The advisory services provided under this programme will remain at the same level as that for 1994-1995.

Section 21. Human rights

43. As a result of its restructuring occurring at the time of the budget reductions, the Centre for Human Rights has been able to reorganize and streamline its programme in order to have more focus, thereby mitigating, to some extent, the impact of the budget cuts. Nevertheless, there have been delays in processing communications concerning alleged violations of human rights and in issuing reports of States parties to the Conventions. Consultations with Governments and fact-finding missions by Special Rapporteurs have been curtailed.

Section 22. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

44. Given the minor role of the regular budget in the overall programme, the impact of the budget reductions will be negligible.

Section 23. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

45. Given the minor role of the regular budget in the overall programme, the impact of the budget reductions will be negligible.

Section 24. Department of Humanitarian Affairs

46. The budget reductions have resulted in delaying and slowing the Department's delivery of outputs and services; some activities have had to be reformulated or combined with others in order to ensure implementation within the biennium. The delay in the conduct of evaluation studies of emergency operations will affect the availability of information on lessons learned in order to strengthen future operations. The reduced resources for travel has affected the scope of needs assessment missions, in terms of composition and duration, as well as the level of issues covered. Because such missions have had to be combined with other travel in order to meet the budget cuts, staff have had to cope with stressful conditions, given the necessity to undertake a broad range of activities within a limited time.

Section 25. Public information

47. In order to take advantage of the latest technological advances, which are anticipated to reduce costs and increase the outreach, some of the activities have been reformulated and staff reassigned in order to consolidate the information technology approach, for example, in connection with the United Nations home page on the Internet. In the Media Division, the lack of long-term opportunities for staff has made recruitment of highly skilled media personnel very difficult and has affected continuity and quality production. Reduced resources for contractual services may affect the level of radio and television coverage and programme production.

48. The activities related to and publicity for the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of Agenda 21 have been curtailed because of reduced resources. Outdated and deteriorating exhibits on the tour route have not been replaced in a timely fashion. The

backstopping of the Department of Public Information/Non-Governmental Organization Resource Centre has been affected, particularly in connection with the delayed processing of applications seeking association with the Department. The number of news missions, journalist encounters and seminars for journalists has been reduced.

49. United Nations information centres have had to curtail their activities by focusing information activities on the immediate location. The intensity, quantity and reach of information activities have been affected; local language versions of United Nations publications have had to be reduced drastically because of lack of funds.

50. The reduction in staff of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library has made it extremely difficult to cope with the simultaneous expansion of new initiatives such as electronic news dissemination and Internet training, which are aimed at eliminating the need for duplicative, costly and outdated news distribution currently undertaken throughout the Secretariat. Reduced staffing has also had an impact on the UN Chronicle, resulting in the suspension of the Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish versions; and delays are also expected in the printing schedule. Cancellations of publications in other Departments have affected the level of sales items that had been expected.

Section 26. Administration and management

51. To mitigate the impact of the budget reductions, measures were taken to simplify processes and procedures and through standardization and automation, reorienting and reorganizing organizational structures and functions. At the same time, the maintenance of vacancies has had an impact on the Secretariat's capacity to implement in a timely manner all its activities.

52. In the Office of Human Resources Management, reductions in staff resources have distracted from addressing issues normally addressed by the Office coupled with the need to address emerging issues related to changing staffing patterns. Activities to upgrade the skills of staff have been rescheduled and fewer national competitive examinations were carried out. Some delays have occurred in personnel administration and some periodic medical examinations and mandatory post-mission medical examinations have not yet been reinstated.

53. In the Office of Programme Planning and Accounts, delays in the issuance of reports to intergovernmental bodies have resulted from the reduction of staff resources. This reduction, coupled with increases in the workload resulting from the revisions to the budget, affected the Offices' ability to respond in a timely manner to requests of auditors, to requests for rulings on financial and budgetary matters or to contribute to reports that have elements relating to financial and budgetary issues particularly in terms of meeting deadlines. The finalization of financial statements has been delayed. Follow-up on recommendations of the Board of Auditors has been delayed and, in some cases, postponed.

54. With regard to Support Services, maintenance and repair projects have only been partially implemented and the computer equipment replacement programme had to be modified by upgrading, instead of replacing, older units. Major

enhancements to the Optical Disk System had to be reduced, delaying accessibility to the document database via the Internet, resources constraints have limited the training programme for Security Officers, security support for unscheduled meetings, the number of hours and operational posts in the annex buildings, the protection support for some mid-level risk personnel visiting the United Nations and investigative work.

55. As far as conference services are concerned, while there have been no serious disruptions of the work of intergovernmental bodies, services for night meetings have been limited for the most part to meetings of the Security Council, the Fifth Committee and the Committee for Programme and Coordination. The acquisition of computers to provide all translators with workstations, enabling them to work on-screen, has had to be delayed. The issuance of meeting records in all languages has also been delayed.

56. In Geneva, the simplification of processes and procedures has resulted in a significant reduction of routine and time-consuming work. Improved office automation has facilitated the implementation of administrative actions.

57. In Vienna, the frequency of inter-office mail delivery and after-hours office cleaning has been reduced. Security shifts have been rescheduled, with some consequent reduction in coverage. Some delays in processing administrative actions have been encountered.

Section 29. Office of Internal Oversight Services

58. Vacancies and reduced travel resources have resulted in the reduction in the number of inspections and comprehensive audit services for all United Nations activities. The number of investigations not expected to be completed has precluded the conduct of proactive reviews; the establishment of the Nairobi Office has been delayed and training plans have been deferred.